

Department of Land and Natural Resources

Sustainability Hotspot

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HANAUMA BAY MARINE LIFE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

~Island of Oahu~



Hanauma Bay Marine Life Conservation District attracts thousands of beachgoers every day. Great numbers of aggressive, schooling fishes feed on food imported by beach users.

As one of Oahu's most popular and scenic tourist destinations, Hanauma Bay hosts approximately 3,500 people each day who snorkel, dive, swim, explore the coral reef and observe the marine life. This resource is the attraction it is today due in part to its establishment as a Marine Life Conservation District (MLCD) in 1967.

Visitor growth at Hanauma Bay peaked in 1990. At the time, as many as 7,600 people per day, or 2.8 million people for the year, visited the beach, presenting major problems with overcrowding and a rapid decline in the marine resources.

Today, the beach, parking areas and other facilities are controlled by the City and County of Honolulu. DLNR controls the submerged areas of Hanauma Bay from the high-water mark on shore out to an imaginary line drawn between Paoluolu Point and Palea Point.

Since fishing is not allowed in the bay (this is one of the few MLCDs in the State where fishing is totally prohibited), fish and other marine resources are under stress from an abundance of people, rather than consumptive uses.

A major risk to the ecosystem is presented by the constant flow of visitors over the inshore reef. Reefs are built by coral polyps, delicate creatures that can be killed simply by people walking on them.

Studies in the bay since the late 1960s indicate that the marine resources have undergone major changes in both numbers and species composition. Crowds of visitors brought with them food that was fed to the fish. This fish feeding resulted in major increases in fish numbers of certain species that could take advantage of the food being introduced. But it also changed the composition of the fish community in the inshore areas of the bay. The larger, more aggressive *pualu* (surgeonfish) and *nenue* (rudder or pilot fish) dominated the community, probably replacing some of the smaller, less aggressive species.

Commercial businesses have expressed a desire to expand existing commercial activities in the bay to possibly include boating, kayaking, dives, and scuba. While these activities would be judged on a case-by-case basis, generally such activities would be discouraged. The County would probably be the first agency to review such activities.

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Top to bottom: The City and County of Honolulu now controls the number of users per day at Hanauma, common inhabitants of the marine district including the protected green sea turtle.

The dual responsibility of managing Hanauma Bay shared by the State and the County may not be a problem as long as the two departments agree on the management plan. The County controls access from land where most of the access is from. Any measure to control land access would be the County's responsibility.

DLNR's Sustainability Hotspot Team:

Alton Miyasaka - Aquatic Resources, Oahu, 587-0092;

Bill Gorst - State Parks;

Randy Honebrink - Aquatic Resources;

Chris Smith - Conservation and Resources Enforcement;

Stephen Thompson - Boating and Ocean Recreation;

is responsible for the management and long-term protection of this resource.

DLNR's Vision for the Future and How to Attain It

DLNR's Division of Aquatic Resources already performs regular surveys of the MLCD at Hanauma, tracking its recovery from the period of drastic decline in the bay's history. This work is covered in part by matching Federal funds. DLNR's long-term hope is that protective measures already in place will allow the bay's marine populations to return to more normal levels so that visitors can have a more natural experience.

In its vision for the future, DLNR will:

- establish the carrying capacity of Hanauma Bay utilizing the limits of acceptable change process;
- improve and expand on-site efforts to educate visitors on detrimental effects of walking on the reef and introducing food and other foreign substances (tanning lotion, trash) to the ecosystem. This will be accomplished by refurbishing the informational kiosk in the lower park area;
- administratively work to amend existing rules to prohibit fish-feeding and boating in the MLCD. Amending of the rules would require administrative costs to prepare documents, conduct meetings and hearings, and follow through with the administrative rule process. Once amended, the rules would require enforcement time, effort, and costs to make sure there is compliance.

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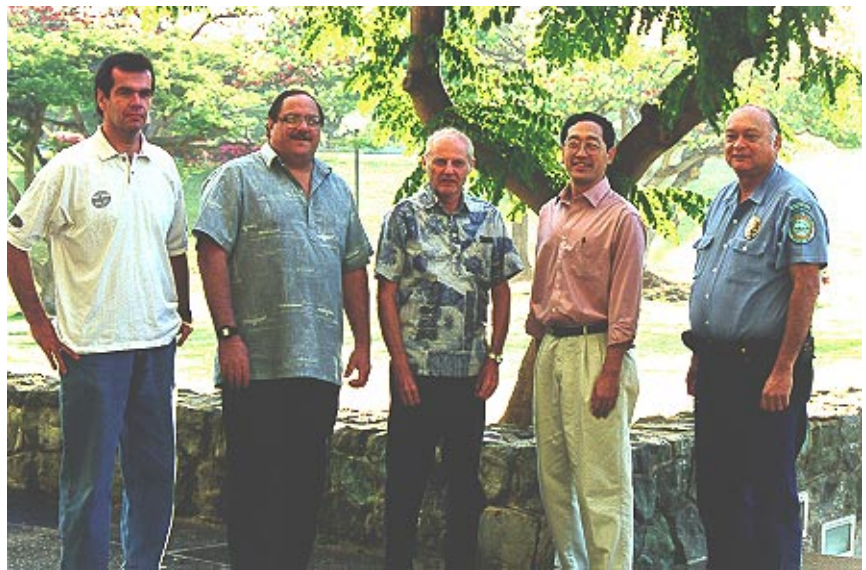
~Island of Oahu~



Top to bottom: Tighter controls on fish-feeding may be enforced at Hanauma, schooling fish at feeding time, DLNR Aquatic Biologist at work in Hanauma.

The County has indicated a willingness to help enforce the proposed prohibition on fish-feeding. In addition, the established Friends of Hanauma Bay would be willing to assist DLNR.

The project to refurbish DLNR's informational kiosk will require a budget of \$20,000, and it is eligible for federal matching funds. Total expected costs are not yet calculated. 🌿



DLNR's Hotspot Team for Hanauma Bay Marine Life Conservation District (l-r): Honebrink, Thompson, Gorst, Miyasaka, Smith.